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Special Feature “Islamic Moderate Trends in South Asia”

An Introduction

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This feature consists of two articles, both of which are based on papers presented at the international workshop “Islamic Moderate Trends in South Asia, from the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century.” The workshop was organized jointly by the Islamic Area Studies Unit 2, Center for Islamic Area Studies, Kyoto University (KIAS) and the “Lingua-Culture Contextual Studies in Ethnic Conflicts of the World” project of Osaka University’s Research Institute for World Languages. The workshop was held at Kyoto University on August 19, 2008.

The first paper, entitled “Commencement of Printing in the Muslim World: A View of Impact on *Ulama* at Early Phase of Islamic Moderate Trends,” was presented by Dr. Moinuddin Aqeel, who was a research fellow of KIAS at the time. Dr. Aqeel is the former chairman of the Department of Urdu in Pakistan’s Karachi University, and is now head of both the Department of Urdu and Centre for Urdu Teaching to Foreigners, at the International Islamic University in Islamabad, Pakistan.

The second paper, “Muhammad Iqbal’s Concept of Islam,” was written by Dr. Zahid Munir Amir. Dr. Zahid is an associate professor at the Department of Urdu in Pakistan’s University Oriental College, University of the Punjab, and, since the spring of 2008, has been a visiting professor at the Department of Urdu at Al-Azhar University, Egypt.

This article focuses on Islamic trends in South Asia, which have been paid little attention in the context of Islamic studies. This is despite the fact that South Asia contains one-third of the world’s Muslim population. Indeed, many of the Islamic world’s most influential thinkers and movements have emerged from South Asia such as, Shah Waliullah’s revivalism; Sir Syed Ahmad Khan’s “Aligarh Movement,” the enlightenment movement in British India; and Abu al-A‘la Maududi’s “Jama‘at-e Islami Movement.” These movements and the ideas they spawned influenced not only South Asian Muslims, but also the whole Islamic world. Dr. Aqeel’s paper focuses on the print media, while Dr. Zahid discusses the reflections of the modern thinker, Muhammad Iqbal. Thus the two papers consider two different aspects of the Islamic population in South Asia.

At the seminar, more than 40 scholars and students gathered from all over Japan. After the presentations, Prof. Misawa Nobuo of Toyo University and Mr. Hirano Junichi of Kyoto University provided comments, following which general discussions were held. It must be noted that lectures and seminars on South Asian Muslims have been organized previously in Japan, however these discussions were confined to the sociological, anthropological, and political science perspectives. Thus, this seminar was the first where the consideration of moderate trends among South Asian Muslims was examined from an Islamic studies framework.

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At this point I would like to describe the project on Islamic moderate trends and the role played by South Asian intellectuals in this area.

The research project “Study on Islamic Moderate Trends” is based out of the Center for Islamic Area Studies at Kyoto University, and we have held twelve seminars since 2007. In these seminars, we have attempted to examine the general character of various moderate trends; in other words our goal is to clarify the elements that constitute a moderate trend. We have found that defining Islamic moderate trends is the most fundamental difficulty obstructing our understanding of the trends. For instance, if one Islamic moderate trend were placed in two different circumstances, in one context it might be regarded as radical, while in the other it might be recognized as secular or even “un-Islamic.”

What are the basic or essential conditions of an Islamic moderate trend? One noteworthy tendency is that the label of “moderate” is often designated by those who are involved in the trends, whereas the “radical” label tends to originate from those outside the trend. One definition of a moderate trend that has been established was arrived at by the “*Mu’tadil* (Balanced) Islamic Reform Party,”¹⁾ the group led by Rashid Rida, the founder of the intellectual journal *Al-Manar* in the late nineteenth century. Their concept of a moderate trend was subsequently adopted and systemized by al-Qaradawi (1926–). He used the word *wasatiyya* (middle way) to explain that Islam is the *umma* of justice (*‘adl*) and balance (*i’tidal*). In Urdu, a language widely understood in South Asia, a moderate trend is called *i’tidal pasand*, a phrase that has become well-known since a political party used it in the Pakistani general election held in February 2008.

Al-Qaradawi established the following conditions for a trend to be labeled as moderate:

1. The trend must be concerned with both a unity of religious essence and modernism; in other words, the trend not only has to maintain the essential teachings of Islam but also must apply them to modern society.
2. The trend has to maintain the balance between the flexible and inflexible elements of Islam.
3. The members of the trend must avoid rigidity and an attitude of subordination.
4. The trend should promote a comprehensive understanding of Islam — if the trend cannot promote an appropriate understanding of Islam in every aspect of society, such as faith, community, politics or legislation, the trend may lapse into radicalism, needlessly refusing to embrace new aspects of the world and maintaining an unbalanced position.

Al-Qaradawi believed that the trends or movements that adhere to these conditions would effectively contribute to Islamic revivalism. According to al-Qaradawi, revival involves the recovery of the right to conduct Islam in society.

Needless to say, Islamic moderate trends can exist alongside other trends, such as secularism (influenced by Westernization), or traditionalism, and even radicalism. However, most of the moderate trends are self-designated, which means that even radicals or secularists have license to call

1) Kosugi Yasushi, 2006, ‘Al-Manar Revisited’, Stephane A. Dudoignon, Komatsu Hisao, Kosugi Yasushi (eds.) *Intellectuals in the Modern Islamic World: Transmission, Transformation, Communication*, New York and London: Routledge, p. 28.

themselves “moderate,” even though others may not agree. Furthermore, even a “moderate Islamic trend” can have both secular and radical elements within it.

We can see a good example of this complexity by examining the recent situation in Pakistan. Last August, President Pervez Musharraf suddenly resigned his office. Ostensibly he did so to avoid further political disorder in Pakistan. However, in reality he had no other option but to resign, in order to avert his impending impeachment, which was initiated due to his suspension of the Pakistani Constitution for the third time in his nine year regime. However, he had a successful record in terms of his diplomatic and domestic politics. Having ousted the previous government in a military coup d’etat, Musharraf found himself in direct violation of the Constitution of Pakistan, occupying as he did, the seats of both the Presidency as well as the Chief of Army staff. The Constitution states that the President of Pakistan “shall not hold any office of profit in the service of Pakistan or occupy any other position carrying the right to remuneration for the rendering of services.”²⁾ Thus, he suspended the Constitution until he was “legally” elected as President of Pakistan in a general election. In addition, during his regime, Musharraf twice declared a State of Emergency in Pakistan. Despite this, however, Musharraf was rarely criticized by the international community after 9/11. In fact Musharraf became a key ally for the US-led “war on terror,” as he was regarded as one of the only leaders from the Islamic world who showed a willingness to cooperate with the war. Thus it is evident that he was mostly welcomed by the international community and, despite his previous record, was regarded as a moderate leader of an Islamic country. Moreover, those less enthusiastic about his regime kept silent and did not vocalize their reservations over his “moderate” policy. In contrast, he faced criticism within Pakistan for his support of the anti-terror policies of the West. In particular, he faced criticism for his alliance with the US, which had been conducting anti-terror offensives in the Islamic world (Iraq and Afghanistan).

This was not the only aspect of his “moderate” stance that drew domestic criticism. When Musharraf successfully amended a criminal law concerning rape, a law which had been widely condemned by the international community, his policy was criticized as being anti-Islamic by religious leaders within Pakistan. In 2004, Musharraf made a speech announcing his wish to make Pakistan a moderate Islamic country, an announcement which was widely welcomed by the international community, including Japan. From Musharraf’s autobiography, published in 2006, it is clear that, during his childhood in Turkey, Musharraf was impressed by the moderate policies of the first president of Turkey, Kemar Ataturk, and this served as an inspiration for the “moderate” Pakistan of which he dreamed.

Pervez Musharraf’s Pakistan serves as a good example of the problems and complexities involved in Islamic moderate trends. In the international community, Musharraf was seen as a moderate leader of a Muslim country. But for others, such as religious leaders within Pakistan, his behavior seemed to be “un-Islamic.” Musharraf’s position was made easier in a sense, as he had strong support from the international community, particularly the US, at a time when the war on

2) National Assembly of Pakistan, 1973, *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan*, Islamabad: Corporation of Pakistan Press, p.20.

terror took precedence. Diplomatically this full cooperation with the war on terror was a sensible decision; Pakistan could use this political stance to offset its foreign debt. Indeed, he even succeeded in establishing a relatively good relationship with India as well, due to his promise to cooperate in the war on terror, particularly in the disputed area of Kashmir.

We thus return to the question of how we can define members of Islamic moderate trends. How might we define the many Muslims who are simply everyday Muslims, practicing their religion in their daily life, without secular or radical inclinations? Can these ordinary people be categorized as adherents to moderate trends, since they are neither secular nor radical? The response to this question must be no. Islamic moderate trends are followed by many kinds of people who hold many different positions. However, the one common element among the various moderate trends is the goal of Islamic revivalism which is realized through action. Regardless of whether the revivalism is regarded as secular or radical, revivalists pursue their own politico-religious activities positively and proactively.

In addition, it is clear that the definition of a moderate trend changes according to political, social, historical and regional contexts. This problem leads us to the following question: which social factors are influential in making a trend or movement “moderate.” Moreover, at present, which among these factors would be the most effective in drawing out the so-called moderate trends? In this feature, we focus on the present roles played by the media in the formation of moderate trends. In order to explore this, we planned an international workshop on the role of media in the formation of moderate Islamic trends in South Asia, with particular focus on the era from the second half of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century.

When the Islamic revivalists, including Rashid Rida and Muhammad ‘Abduh, began discussing Islamic moderate trends in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, most of the Islamic world was experiencing influence from the West which was transforming their religious lives. In addition, media networks and transport systems had improved, which meant that Muslim intellectuals all over the world could establish networks. In particular the journal introduced by Rashid Rida and the mouthpiece of Rida’s reforming “moderate” model of Islam, was hugely influential. *Al-Manar* was smuggled into the Malay Peninsula where it spawned similar journals, such as *Al-Munir* and *Al-Imam*. In Turkey, a journal entitled *Sirat-i Mustakim* was published, with many translations of articles by well-known modernist authors like Muhammad ‘Abduh and Muhammad Farid Wahidi.³⁾ Muslims in China also launched the journal *Yuehua* which tried to educate Chinese Muslims to cooperate with the movements aimed towards establishing the nation state of China, and encouraged them to become an integral part of the Chinese nation.⁴⁾ Thus, proactive and positive attitudes of Islamic moderate trends were spread and encouraged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, by modern technology, particularly the print media. Nowadays, all types of media —

3) Kasuya Gen, 2006, ‘The Influence of Al-Manar on Islamism in Turkey’, Stephane A. Dudoignon, Komatsu Hisao, Kosugi Yasushi (eds.) *Intellectuals in the Modern Islamic World: Transmission, Transformation, Communication*, New York and London: Routledge, p. 76.

4) Matsumoto Masumi, 2006, ‘Rationalizing Patriotism’, Stephane A. Dudoignon, Komatsu Hisao, Kosugi Yasushi (eds.) *Intellectuals in the Modern Islamic World: Transmission, Transformation, Communication*, New York and London: Routledge, p. 130.

newspapers, journals, periodicals, books, radio, TV, videos, DVDs and the Internet — are utilized effectively in the revival of Islam. In brief, moderate trends take advantage of various media to enlighten and educate Muslims all over the world. Indeed, the very utilization of media is a result of the acceptance moderate Islamic trends show towards the utilization of modern systems born in the West. The situation in South Asia in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries, was not an exception but rather a typical case in this respect. South Asia had been subject to direct British rule since the 1858, after the Indian Mutiny of 1857. In South Asia, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan started the journal *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq* in 1873, the purpose of which was to enlighten Muslims in India. This is just one example of the many publications that emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century, in South Asia (known as “British India” at the time). Many publishers were established under the patronage of the British and local aristocrats for the purpose of enlightenment. This enlightenment was part of the wider British aim to groom Indians to become modern in a pro-British fashion. Thomas McCauley, in his famous speech entitled “Education in India” outlined it thus: “We [the British] must at present do our best to form a class [of natives] who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.”⁵⁾ The policy enjoyed a degree of success. In some localities, the colonized population accepted not only the British modern system but also the mindset of the colonizer. Some locals, including Muslims, began to write works in support of the British. For example, Deputy Nadhir Ahmad, the first Urdu novelist, set the enlightenment of India according to the Western model as a central motif in his writing, including discussions on women’s employment and the choice of a Westernized way of life.

On the other hand, some localities fought to retain their religious identities. That is, they accepted the modern system but, at the same time, emphasized their distinct religious identity. When Sir Syed Ahmad Khan began to lead the enlightenment movement, he was criticized by some of his fellow Indians for pandering to the British. Particularly controversial was his stress on the significance of modern education, which included the theory of evolution. Despite being regarded in some quarters as a *kaafir*, or non-believer, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan continued to promote the importance of modern education for Muslims. His aim was not to start an enlightenment movement that would only serve to cooperate with the British, but to ensure that Muslims would be capable in the modern era, which was imperative.

Another point worth mentioning is the fact that several Muslims significantly contributed to the publication of books on Islam. Nadwat al-Ulama, the Islamic academic institution based at Lucknow, was at that time, one of the most famous publishers of works on Islamic culture. Its publications ranged from classics to more contemporary books. It should be mentioned here that a central aspect of the revival of Islamic culture was the increased publication of classic Islamic books. It was not only Muslims themselves who were involved in the revitalized publication of classic Islamic literature. In fact some of the most prolific publishers were Hindus, among them, Munshi Harsukh

5) Tariq Rahman, 2004, *Language and Education: Selected Documents (1780–2003)*, Islamabad: Quaid-i-Azam University.

Ra'e and his pupil Munshi Nawal Kishor. Both started to print Islamic books and newspapers in 1849 in Lahore, which was the center of the print media (rather than Delhi) in British India. Nawal Kishor went to Lucknow and established the Nawal Kishor Press, which published more than 300 Urdu and Persian books. The books included many religious masterpieces as well as fables and poetry. The fact that Hindus also contributed to the Islamic print media indicates that Urdu had become, at that time, a common language among the literati of South Asia. The influence of the Nawal Kishor Press remains to the present day; their reprinted editions are still used, in both Pakistan and India. By reading the classic masterpieces, many readers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, particularly Muslims in South Asia, were introduced to the rich heritage of Islam. Another famous printing center was Dar al-Musannifin, a writer's institute in Azamgarh, which was established in 1914 by Shibli Nu'mani, and was influenced by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. Shibli Nu'mani wrote many books on Islamic culture, such as the famous, *Shi'r al-'Ajam* (Poetry in Persia).

The contribution of the Deobandi movement on the Islamic revival in South Asia should not be ignored. This movement started in 1876, in the city of Deoband. Some *ulama*, established madrassas following the modern system and gathered funds from the Muslim community in order to maintain the independence of the madrassas, since the British controlled *waqf* after the Indian Mutiny of 1857. The madrassas issued many fatwas concerning all kinds of issues facing Muslims in South Asia. Many Muslims in South Asia did not have a concrete understanding of the legalities of their religion as much of their everyday lives were deeply influenced by other religions, such as Hinduism. By printing these fatwas and offering clarification to everyday Muslims, the Deobandi movement inspired a grass roots level revival, resulting in the successful education of many Muslims.

It is important to note that the development of the media brought Muslims to a new concept of Islam in South Asia. Muslims all over South Asia experienced a kind of "pan-nation fraternity." Furthermore, prior to the introduction of the modern transport system, Muslims in South Asia had lived in their own regions, separately with little or no contact between them due to the limits in transport and information exchanges. However, with the introduction of modern technology such as railroads and the postal system as well as new, far-reaching media, Muslims became aware, for the first time, of other Muslims living elsewhere in South Asia. For instance, a newspaper published in Lahore would circulate in most of the large cities in the northern part of South Asia. An intellectual in Calcutta who wrote a letter to that newspaper in response to an article, would see his letter published in the next issue. A Muslim in Delhi could comment on that letter, and his comment would be seen in another issue. Muslims became aware of the many intellectuals in British India, with whom they could exchange opinions. This awareness brought about a sense of shared identity and sympathy for each other. In 1884, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan delivered a lecture to Muslims about the need for the *qawm*, or Muslim sense of solidarity, to be strengthened. In his words, the *qawm* had not yet developed into a concept of *qawmiyya* — a wider term, denoting a kind of Muslim nationality — and which was eventually established at the beginning of the twentieth century. He explained that the word *qawm* centered on both kinship and geographical relation. He emphasized the necessity of the

modern educational system for the achievement of *qawm*.⁶⁾ However, with the introduction of this concept of solidarity, Muslims began to form an identity as part of a pan-Nation fraternity, distinct from that of the Hindus in South Asia. With the evolution of a sophisticated and wide-reaching print media, it became easy for Muslims in South Asia to convey their messages throughout the region and the number of journals and books related to Islamic contemporary issues increased.

Muhammad Iqbal was among the Muslim intellectuals who appealed to Muslims in South Asia to “wake up” and “stand up for themselves.” He wrote many poems in both Persian and Urdu and conceived the metaphor for the ideal Muslim as a falcon, moving freely in this world without any constraints. Iqbal emphasized the concept of “a complete Muslim,” which was said to have been influenced by Nietzsche’s concept of “a complete human being.” Iqbal, who grew up in a religious Muslim family and was taught Arabic and Persian in his childhood, was later influenced by a British professor named Thomas Arnold, who supervised Iqbal’s studies when he was pursuing his master’s degree at the Government College in Lahore. Later, at the instigation of Arnold, he studied Western thought at institutes in England (Cambridge) and Germany (Munich) from 1905 to 1908, where he had the opportunity to meet prominent Western philosophers. This upbringing gave Iqbal a unique perspective wherein he could compare between the traditions of both East and West. He pointed out the contradictions and flaws of the Western system, notably in concepts such as “democracy” — government by the rule of the majority — and “nation.” He also expressed nationalistic ideas, which featured significantly in his early poetry, and were deeply influential within the Muslim population.⁷⁾ In the 1920s, Iqbal entered into politics in British India and by 1926, he had become a legislative member of the Punjab province. In 1930, at the convention of the Indian Muslim League in Allahabad — where he served as chairman of the convention — Iqbal outlined his plan for a “North-western Muslim State.” Consequently, many regard Iqbal’s plan as a blueprint for what was to become Pakistan and consider him to be the founder of Pakistan. Iqbal’s poems reveal a sense of “*umma*” which extends beyond geographical borders and ethnicities:

The dimness of the stars is evidence of the bright morning
 The sun has risen over the horizon; the time of deep sleep has passed
 The blood of life runs in the veins of the dead East
 Avicenna and Farabi cannot understand this secret
 The storm in the West made Muslims, Muslims
 Pearls are introduced in abundance from the very bufferings of the sea
 The true believers are once more to receive from the court of God,
 the glory of the Tukamans, the intellect of the Indians and the eloquence of the Arabs.
 (Tulu’-e Islam: The Rise of Islam)⁸⁾

6) Sar Saiyad Ahmad Khan, Maulana Muhammad Isma’il Panipatti (ed.), *‘Qawmi Ta’lim Qawmi Handardi aur Bahami Ittifaq’*, Maqalat-e Sar Saiyad, 12, Lahore: Majlis Taraqqi Urdu, pp. 131–132.

7) David Matthews, 1993, *Iqbal: A Selection of the Urdu Verse*, London: University of London. p. 1.

8) Matthews, *ibid.*, pp. 74–75.

China and Arabia are ours; India is ours.
We are Muslims, the whole world is ours.
God's unity is held in trust in our breasts.
It is not easy to erase our name and sign.
Among the idol temples of the world the first is that house of God.
We are its keepers; it is our keeper.
Brought up in the shadow of the sword, we have reached maturity,
the scimitar of the crescent moon is the emblem of our community.
In the valleys of the West our call to prayer resounded,
Our onward flow was never stemmed by anyone.
(Tarana-e Milli: The Anthem of the Islamic Community)⁹⁾

Iqbal explained that the concept of *qawm* in Islam differs completely from the Western concept of nation. He continued to encourage Muslims to confront their colonizers, the British. He presented his thoughts mainly through his beautiful poetry, which could be recited and remembered by ordinary Muslims. His poetry motivated many Muslims to initiate political movements. Many thinkers and activists of contemporary Islamic revival movements or Islamic moderate trends, including Abu al-A'la Maududi, used the poems of Iqbal to visualize their concepts of Islamic revival. Whilst Iqbal is known predominantly as the pioneer of the concept of Pakistan, his fame is not limited to South Asia due to his Persian poetry, which bought him significant fame, particularly in Iran. Iqbal was a significant contributor to both the Islamic revivalist movements as well as other Islamic movements. The Muslim media at that time was primarily concerned with discussing how Muslims should live a Muslim life under the influence of Western modernization. These discussions motivated the public and led them to initiate political movements. These movements started at a grass roots level and some grew into large-scale political movements, such as the Pakistan Movement.

In this feature, Dr. Moinuddin Aqeel will discuss the role of the print media on the modernization of Islamic West Asia, which had a significant impact on Muslims in South Asia. Dr. Zahid Munir Amir will present Muhammad Iqbal's concept of Islam from a moderate perspective. Our previous projects focused on Islamic moderate trends, in Turkey, Egypt and China. It is well known that although these moderate trends or Islamic revival movements began in separate areas of the world, the exchange of information through the print media and the improvement of transport networks produced a wide network of Muslim intellectuals across the world. Thus, trends from disparate areas influenced each other almost simultaneously. This simultaneous influence through media and global contact can be seen in the contemporary era where it has become even more effective. Therefore studying the role of the media is an essential aspect of the study of the mechanisms of the "motivation" that lies behind Islamic moderate trends.

This special feature focuses on the period from the second half of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century. The "long" twentieth century witnessed the introduction and

9) Matthews, *ibid.*, pp. 28–29.

development of many moderate trends in the Islamic world. We will continue to study the trends of these other areas and eras, and finally we will elucidate how Muslim intellectuals have been investing in efforts to establish a middle and moderate way for Islamic revival today.